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SUBJECT: SETTLEMENT FREEZE: YEDIOTH REPORT ON IDF CONCERNS REGARDING
POLITICAL SUPPORT

¶1. (U) Influential journalist Alex Fishman, lead military correspondent for Yedioth Ahronoth, published an article on Friday, December 4 (Note: this is the equivalent to the Sunday paper) in which he conveyed IDF concerns about the extent of GOI political support for IDF efforts to uphold the law in the West Bank, especially on outposts, and for their failure to uphold previous commitments on settlements. Fishman adds his own criticism of the GOI for undermining U.S. efforts to build a regional coalition against Iran through unhelpful actions and rhetoric. Fishman writes that as the IDF enforces the current settlement freeze, it is wondering if the political leadership will once again "send troops to a mission" while betraying that mission with a "wink" to the settlers. The full text of the article, as translated from Hebrew by Israel News Today, appears in paragraph 3.

¶2. (SBU) COMMENT: The Embassy is repeating this article for two reasons. First, the article is significant because appears in Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel's largest circulation daily. Unlike Ha'aretz, Yedioth Ahronoth is written for the Israeli mainstream; its audience is "middle Israel" rather than the expatriate community and Israeli intellectuals. The tone of the article is unusually harsh for both the newspaper and the author. Second, Alex Fishman maintains very close ties to the leadership of the IDF. He is their favorite avenue for strategic leaks and his articles, while reflecting his own opinions, almost always capture the pulse of army. END COMMENT.

¶3. (U) See below for the full text of Alex Fishman's article.

BEGIN TEXT

URBAN WARFARE

Yedioth Ahronoth (p. B4) by Alex Fishman -- In two to three months, around February-March, the free world will move on to a new phase in its confrontation with Iran. There is already an understanding, including among the Americans, that the Iranians have no intention of accepting any compromise offered. All efforts at dialogue have so far ended in failure. Even the Russians realize this and are now cooperating.

The International Atomic Energy Agency is expected to reach a decision this month, which will lead the UN Security Council to tighten economic and political sanctions against Iran. Approving this and garnering international support will take at least two months. The Americans are acting wisely and patiently this time around. They don't want to go at it alone. They're reaching understandings with all sides.

Only the Chinese are left. The Saudis, for their part, have been recruited to guarding their oil prices the day after sanctions on Iran are imposed. And at the same time economic sanctions begin, so will the military clock start ticking.

Only America's intimate and strategic partner is dealing with trivialities. Senior administration officials have not said this clearly to the defense minister or the prime minister, when the two visited Washington, but this is what they are thinking and transmitting: We're fed up with you! You want money, aid,

cooperation? Start behaving like allies. Our present day interest mandates quiet in the Middle East. Do not disturb!

Your contribution to the game ought to be calming the region by reviving the peace process with the Palestinians. After all, it was you who suggested, as far back as September, the idea of freezing settlement construction as a means of bringing Abu Mazen back to talks, so do something with this. We don't really believe in this move, but you're the ones who sold us on this whole temporary construction freeze idea, so at least stand by it.

This was not said in words. There is still diplomatic cordiality. But there's nobody who isn't getting the message, which states: "we're heading towards an escalation with Iran, and recruiting the entire world, so stop behaving like the spoiled and delinquent kid in class."

Seriousness Fees

On Sunday the government decided to join the enlightened world, to behave properly and to abide by its commitments. But someone who has grown accustomed to lying all these years, one who has always announced day and night that he is upholding the law, all the while sending winks to the settlers, and making it clear to them that they are his favorites - has a hard time going clean.

For decades the state has existed in the shadow of these lies, and everyone knew, including the army.

On the eve of concluding his service as OC Central Command two months ago, Gadi Shamni wrote a document for his superiors in the IDF General Staff. It was an internal conclusion letter, but it intentionally deviated towards the political echelon. He wrote: One

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cannot expect the OC Central Command to seriously deal with evacuation of outpost and illegal settlements, if these decisions are not backed by significant support in manpower, inspectors, heavy machinery for demolition, police, transport vehicles and so forth. As long as the political echelon's decisions are not supported by the appropriate resources, this is essentially a wink to the settlers.

This is not a precise quote, but it does reflect the spirit of things. The document was passed on to Shamni's replacement, Avi Mizrahi, and subsequently became the Central Command's guidebook. Now everyone is waiting to see if this too is an Israeli-style bluff. Will this freeze melt away and turn into a temporary moratorium, in lip service only, at the end of which ministers and settlers embrace each other warmly, and those remaining bruised and battered on the field licking their wounds will again be the inspectors, the policemen and the Civil Administration officials - and the soldiers?

The new OC Central Command, Maj. Gen. Avi Mizrahi has not yet had time to lose his innocence. He has not yet served as a military secretary-not for the defense minister and not for the prime minister. Mizrahi was and still is a tank man. At the end of the weekend he issued executive orders to freeze construction in the West Bank, which did not fall - in either their extensiveness or detail - from a plan to occupy the Syrian capital.

On Friday "intelligence before operation" footage was taken by Ofek aircraft. Aerial photos were distributed to the various brigades, the Civil Administration prepared its work plan, the regional brigades were to execute a series of orders and to approve the plans, determine the traffic movement, and pass on event-and-response data.

The earlier aerial photos are the basis. What was legally built up until the photo taken, will be allowed. All construction from the moment the photo was taken - is to be forbidden.

However, already that Friday, the IDF received a problematic signal. Minister Gilad Erdan explained to all those concerned that the freeze order issued by the cabinet was legally flawed and that it should therefore not be implemented. The military leadership sprung

as though bitten by a snake: "What is this thing? On the one hand the government tasks us with a mission, and on the other hand, a government minister, of the Likud, is telling us that it is illegal. How can we send troops to a mission this way?" asked a senior officer in anger.

Barak and Netanyahu extinguished this small fire with internal conversations. On Tuesday the defense minister arrived at the Central Command with one mission only: promise the OC and the top command there that there would be no winks. That he was serious.

What remains pending is how to legally handle the council chairmen who tore up construction freeze orders - before all in sundry and video cameras - and one council chairman who locked the settlement's gates, and forced the police to forcefully enter. Barak ordered that complaints be filed against them and that legal proceedings begin. At the same time he ordered the IDF: the settlements whose leaders show resistance to security forces activity are to receive a cold shoulder in return.

Is the defense minister truly prepared to change the historical rules of the game in West Bank? Will "seriousness fees" truly be paid? What will be done, for example, to Beit Aryeh's security coordinator, who blocked the entry of inspectors with his military vehicle, which is financed by the IDF? So far the army has confiscated his vehicle. And what will come next? Will he be employed in the future?

On the surface, it appears that Barak is serious. At the beginning of the week, for example, he held discussions about financial support given by various unnamed organizations to soldiers who demonstrate against settlement evacuation. In the end he ordered the State Attorney's Office to examine the possibility of filing lawsuits against these organizations for sedition. The State Attorney's Office was hesitant. They had their own legal reservations. But on the weekend, after having examined the evidence, they began legal proceedings against these foundations. If this works, the defense minister is truly establishing new rules for the game.

END TEXT

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